

**CRASC Technical Committee
Meeting Minutes
Turners Falls, Massachusetts
April 2, 2003**

1. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes from the Meeting on January 8, 2003

Mr. Jay McMenemy, Technical Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m. and adjourned at 1:06 p.m.

There was no representative present from Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries.

Mr. John Warner moved to approve the Minutes from the January meeting. Mr. Steve Roy seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved.

2. Fish Culture Subcommittee Update

Mr. Ken Gillette reported that the Subcommittee had not met since the last Technical Committee meeting.

Mr. Gillette provided the following summary on the status of surplus Atlantic salmon brood stock at the White River NFH:

<u>Receiving Agency</u>	<u>Number of Brood Stock</u>
MAFW	835
VTFW	200
RIFW	487
CTDEP-WSS	99
<u>USFWS-RCNSS</u>	<u>150</u>
Total	1,800

Mr. Gillette described the progress of construction at the White River NFH. He said that major antiquated electrical components at the facility had been replaced including generators and boilers. This was expected to make the facility more energy efficient, less costly to operate, and safer. The re-use system is still under construction and expected to be completed at the end of May or in early June.

Mr. McMenemy summarized fry production:

<u>Hatchery</u>	<u>Number of Fry Produced</u>
White River NFH	4.54M
Pittsford NFH	285K
CT hatcheries	920K
Roger Reed SFH	1.05M
Roxbury SFH	200K
Warren SFH	148K
Total Fry Production	7.1M

Mr. Gabe Gries indicated that fry produced at the Warren SFH will be released as fed-fry. The fry have been on feed (provided by the White River NFH) for 3-4 weeks. They tested negative for disease. The hatchery can handle production at this level in the future but increases in incubation/production will require a chiller.

The fry production total is close to the number produced last year but below the Program goal of 10M fry. Stocking will commence in Connecticut on April 16 and conclude in New Hampshire and Vermont on May 23. Stocking schedules are available.

Mr. Steve Gephard summarized the spring smolt stocking plans:

<u>Hauling Agency</u>	<u>Number of Smolts</u>	<u>Stocking Site</u>
NHFG	43K - 4 trips	Mainstem, Sportsmens Marina, Hadley
CTDEP	18K	Farmington River
MAFW	16K - 2 trips	Westfield River @ DSI downstream bypass or Mainstem at Chicopee boat launch
<u>USFWS</u>	<u>6K - 2 trips</u>	Mainstem, Chicopee boat launch
Total	83K	

The smolts have been marked with an adipose clip. Mr. Gephard indicated that he would check with Mr. Steve McCormick to see if there will be any physiology studies completed. None were conducted at the hatchery.

3. Congressional Initiative Update

Ms. Janice Rowan reported that Mr. Duncan McInnes, Mr. Jim Carroll and she had visited legislative offices in DC on March 10-12. All of the basin legislators appeared willing to sign a "Dear Colleague" letter supporting a member request for a \$770,000 appropriation for CRASC in FY2004. Senators Kerry and Kennedy have since worked together and submitted an appropriations request to the Subcommittee. Senator Dodd is circulating a "Dear Colleague" letter in the Senate. Representative Simmons is circulating a "Dear Colleague" letter in House. The House deadline is April 3. Additionally, NGO support letters and calls have been made or submitted including those from the Connecticut River Joint Commissions, Westfield River Watershed Association, West River Watershed Alliance, and Connecticut River Salmon Association.

Mr. Carroll added that he made an impromptu visit to Representative Larson's office where a school group that he had worked with happened to be visiting. The recognition that Carroll was accorded was increased and Mr. Jonathan Renfrew, Legislative Aide, spoke to Carroll subsequently for a full hour. Mr. Carroll indicated that this was a good example of the name and program recognition that the Commission has achieved through these DC visits.

Mr. Paul Pajak, who attended many of the DC meetings, noted that legislative staff were energized by the volunteer, education and outreach aspects of the program. He said that the Commission still needs to figure out how to get the Connecticut River delegation to deliver.

4. USFWS Budget Concerns

Mr. Pajak said that Congress had passed a 2003 budget last month and that the USFWS Fisheries Program in Region 5 could expect final numbers in three weeks. Preliminary figures indicate that field stations in the region will have to absorb a 20% cut to their operations budget (non-salary dollars). He said that all current vacancies will be maintained and no positions will be lost. There is currently no flexibility to close offices or move staff. He added that little or no relief is expected for the program in 2004 unless there is a Congressional add to the budget.

USFWS Field stations provided some indication of what might be expected given the cuts but there was some confusion among the project Leaders as to the extent of the cuts. Nevertheless, serious concerns exist in 2003:

- Mr. Gillette reported that he would be unable to fill the Assistant Project Leader and Biologist positions. He also reported that he would have no funds for tagging as required to maintain genetic marking program
- Mr. Larry Lofton indicated that he might not have funds for holding domestic brood stock and would likely have to reduce part of both the remaining Merrimack and Connecticut programs
- Ms. Rowan reported that there was one known: two interns would be available to help in the program in April & May, and 1 intern through August but that these were hired with funding sources that will not be available in 2004
- Mr. Mickey Novak reported that his Biologist position was extended for another year in April but that deep cuts might impact his ability to collect and handle sea runs

Mr. Gephard and Mr. Caleb Slater offered the potential of assistance in moving sea runs if needed.

5. Status of Fishway Monitors

Mr. Slater indicated that MAFW did not plan to staff the fishways at Turners Falls but would instead rely on videotape to capture fish passage counts at this site. The Agency is also planning to rely on the Westfield River Watershed Association to staff the DSI Fishway with possible assistance from Mr. John O'Leary who is now back at MAFW. Mr. Slater said that he would himself be managing the fishway in Lowell since he had no staff assistance on the Merrimack River either.

Mr. Slater asked if the interpreters at the fishway could be charged with changing the videotapes used to monitor the fishway and Mr. Bob Stira agreed to look into the feasibility of the proposal.

There is no staff to count the fish on the videos but partners (CTDEP, NHFG, and VTFW) agreed to help with the backlog after the season. There is a possibility that all of the existing fishway staff could review tapes when the fishways are otherwise closed by high water. The data is considered to be especially important this year since this is the third year of shad passage study at Turners Falls.

Mr. Alex Haro will be conducting a digital imagery trial and will review the digital data for a period of passage lasting a couple of weeks.

Mr. Gries pointed out that the NHFG had requested funds to monitor passage at the Vernon fishway. The Bellows Falls fishway will not be staffed but it will be equipped with a PIT tag reader that will record the passage of tagged salmon.

6. Status of Whittemore Salmon Station

Mr. Gephard reported that Mr. Ed Parker has announced that the Bureau of Natural Resources in Connecticut is facing severe budget cuts in 2004. If the worst case scenario of a 40% cut is realized, then the state will eliminate everything but trout stocking. If no new dollars (from state or federal sources) are added to the budget by October 1, 2003, the CTDEP will initiate closure of the Whittemore Salmon Station. He noted that the agency is not anticipating other reductions in the program, beyond closure of the Whittemore facility at this time.

The Whittemore Salmon Station has been operating since 1981. It currently serves as a sea run holding facility. The staff recondition kelts, spawn sea runs, kelts and domestics, manage the genetic egg bank for the program, and incubate 200,000 eggs at Hogback. These functions will be lost to the program if the facility is closed. Additionally, the two permanent staff will be transferred to vacant positions in trout hatcheries elsewhere in the state. So, the program will also lose an important measure of expertise.

Normal operations can be expected this spring (Staff have a blanket travel authorization during the season to address fish issues through June). Phased shut-down of the Salmon Station will be initiated this summer with the facility placed in caretaker status after spawning is completed in the fall. The agency will be looking for a home for the 2003 sea-run kelts and other year-classes of kelts. The domestics and older kelts will be sacrificed.

The Technical Committee must give some consideration to a strategy for collecting and holding sea runs in the future. This issue was not discussed in any depth. Each of the other agency representatives provided a budget status update for their agencies/offices:

Mr. Slater indicated that major agency reorganization was under discussion in Massachusetts.

Mr. Gries said that as of mid-June, he would lose his Biological Technician. This will mean that he will not be able to conduct fall index site assessments and it will impact fry stocking next year. The shad and herring transfers and evaluations will not be impacted.

Mr. McMenemy indicated that there is one vacancy at the St. Johnsbury office but that the existing vacancy in Roxbury will be filled.

Mr. Roy indicated that the Green Mountain National Forest has their final budget - a flat budget. This means they will be absorbing about a 5% cut. He said that salaries amount to only 50-60% of the total budget (vs. 70-95% in USFWS Fisheries). The way the USFS does business with habitat projects insulates them from the impacts of small budget cuts and uncontrollable cost increases. He is expecting a flat or increased budget in 2004.

Mr. Dave MacDuffee said that NOAA/NMFS is facing cuts, with the Habitat Division generally less well funded than other Divisions.

Mr. Carroll attended a Connecticut Fishery Advisory Council meeting last week where Burt Kaplan from the American Sportfishing Association spoke about additional threats to state funding. The newest threat is based on proposed legislation to cut Wallop Breaux funding for Sport Fish Restoration work and transfer those funds to boating safety. The boating industry has lobbied for an increased apportionment and this is the result. There are two bills pending. One, lodged in a Federal Highway Bill, calls for a 6.6% cut in 2004. This means each of the basin states would see a \$180K cut. The second bill, advocated by the American League of Anglers and Boaters, calls for a 2.2% cut in 2004. This means each of the basin states would see a \$60,000 cut. Under the current circumstances neither cut is acceptable. Mr. Carroll was deeply concerned and wanted the Commissioners to be aware of this and to take immediate action to express concern about what will happen if either of these bills passes as written. No bill numbers were available. Ms. Rowan asked folks to contact Mr. Ron Essig, USFWS Federal Aid, for more details (Phone: 413-253-8504).

7. Fish Passage Subcommittee Update

Mr. Warner provided the following updates:

HYDRO LICENSING

Holyoke Project

- Progress on implementing new license fish passage requirements continues:
 - New channel with weirs cut to provide passage and escape for stranded shad
 - New entrance gate insert in Hadley #2 fishway entrance
 - Full depth louvers in place
 - Sturgeon exclusion rack in place at #1 Overflow/fishway attraction water gate

Mr. Novak added that the Holyoke lift was expected to open next week depending on flows. Mr. Brian Adams from Greenfield Community College is responsible for hiring the Holyoke monitors this year and Mr. Jimmy Clark is the lift supervisor.

Fifteen Mile Falls Project - Connecticut River - NH/VT

- PG&E has been reviewing downstream passage options at Moore and Comerford and should be providing a response soon.
- McIndoes bypass modified. Testing with hatchery smolts to be done in 2003.

Russell - Westfield Paper Dam - Westfield River - MA

- Attempts to resurrect defunct hydro site underway with the filing of an Exemption application and a Preliminary Permit Application
- Simultaneously FERC is conducting a jurisdictional review
- Current owner of the dam fined by MADEP for illegal dredging without a permit

DSI-West Springfield - Westfield River - MA

- Mill and hydro up for sale. Passage should not be affected.

FISH PASSAGE ACTIVITIES

Upstream Passage

Turners Falls Project - Connecticut River

Further evaluations of the Cabot ladder, and gatehouse ladder to be conducted in 2003.

Downstream Passage

Deerfield River Project - Deerfield River - MA

A PIT tag study with wild smolts is planned for 2003 to evaluate outmigration timing and duration. A hatchery smolt study is also planned.

Mr. Warner also reported that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had agreed to release USFWS Aquatic Base Flows (ABF) as standard operations as long as their dams are not in flood control mode. They also agreed to implement acceptable ramping rates. Mr. Warner asked anyone observing spikes in flows below these dams to notify him immediately so that compliance can be obtained.

Ms. Rowan reported that the Upstream & Downstream Passage Notification letters had been distributed. She also noted that the Silk Mill Dam on Yokum Brook in Becket, MA had been removed in February.

Mr. Gephard said that the Leesville Fishway would open Friday. The Rainbow fishway will open April 15 or 16. All other fishways in Connecticut are open and alewife have already passed at some facilities.

Mr. Gries gave an update on the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant issue: Over the past 6-8 months, various organizations (VTFW, USFWS, NHFG) have been working with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources regarding a request from Vermont Yankee to increase their discharge temperature limits to the Connecticut River during the “summer” period of May 14th to October 14th (see attached table). VY has submitted a study plan for review and also produced a 316(A) demonstration in support of the increased discharge temperature limits and a hydrothermal modeling report of the cooling water discharge from the plant. The demonstration and hydro thermal modeling reports are under review.

Vermont ANR has hired a third party consultant (Versar) to assist with the evaluation of VY’s study plan, hydrothermal modeling and study results. The study plan is currently being reviewed by the various agencies.

To date, VY has only requested increases in discharge temperature limits during the “summer” period. However, it is likely that they will soon be requesting increases in thermal limits during the “winter” period as well (October 15th to May 13th).

Station 3 is located 0.65 miles below the Vernon Dam and Station 7 is located 4 miles upstream of VY. At Station 3, VY considers river temperatures to be fully mixed and river temperatures at Station 7 are assumed to be indicative of the “ambient” river temperature.

8. Shad Studies Subcommittee Update

Mr. Slater reported that the Cabot Station shad passage study with the Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center will continued this spring.

Mr. Novak will coordinate shad requests and transfers according to 2002 protocols.

The State of Connecticut has extended the river herring fishery closure in 2004. Massachusetts is permitting hook-and-line catch of herring only, with no bag limit, and herring cannot be live if used as bait.

9. Salmon Studies Update

Mr. McMenemy indicated that smolt survival this spring was about 6% less than last year but was still considered to be good.

Mr. Stira indicated plans to conduct the annual smolt mark-recapture study.

Mr. Tim Brush from Normandeau Associates indicated that they would be conducting the Deerfield River adult Atlantic salmon passage study again. Adults will be handled according to 2002 protocols. The first ten salmon returning to Holyoke will be captured and transported to the Richard Cronin NSS. The next ten, depending on the strength of returns, will be radio-tagged and released. Only 2SW fish will be tagged. DNA and scale samples will be taken and the fish will be injected with antibiotics prior to release.

Mr. Stira cautioned everyone about changes in dam security at Holyoke that may impact access to the dam. There are new procedures in place. He recommended that all visits to the dam, official and otherwise, be cleared in advance.

10. Re-Cap of Research Forum

Mr. McMenemy reported that the CRASC Research Forum was held on February 11, 2003 at the USFWS Regional Office in Hadley, MA. The Forum was arranged by the Coordinator's Office with assistance from the Sunderland OFA. There was a total of 9 speakers, 3 poster exhibits, and 85 participants. This successful meeting received favorable comments from many of those attending. Discussion on how to manage the 2005 Forum was deferred to a later date.

11. Other Business

The Technical Committee approved three fish requests:

- Jeff Tyler, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, 75 parr for a habitat selection modeling study; Parr source - WRNFH
- Caleb Slater, MAFW, 500 KSSH smolts for RRSFH brood stock
- Ben Letcher, USGS, 50 wild smolts for predation tag study

Mr. Steve Rideout proposed that the USFWS develop a Science Support Partnership Project with the USGS to develop a standardized and populated database consistent with the Maine Atlantic Salmon database. The Technical Committee agreed to review this proposal among other research needs but was generally disposed favorably toward this project. Mr. Dave Perkins, USFWS, is the Fisheries liaison for SSP Proposals.

Mr. Rideout also talked to the group about a landscape level research project proposal to bring universities and stakeholders together to develop a science-based model to see and predict future conditions in the watershed as a key to facing issues in the watershed. There is an effort underway to get Congressional funding for the project.

12. Next Technical Committee Meeting Date: 10/8/2003

Attendance

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Sreve Gephard	CTDEP
David MacDuffee	NOAA/NMFS
Steve Rideout	USGS
Paul Pajak	USFWS
Jim Carroll	Connecticut River Salmon Association
Ken Gillette	USFWS
Ben Letcher	USGS
Lynn Dewald	Vermont Yankee
Tim Brush	Normandeau Associates
Larry Lofton	USFWS
Alex Haro	USGS
Bob Stira	Northeast Generating Services
Rosemarie Fisher	NH/VT Volunteer
Warren Fisher	NH/VT Volunteer
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Chivia Horton	The Environmental Careers Organization
Darleen Cutting	USFWS
Mickey Novak	USFWS
Caleb Slater	MAFW
Gabe Gries	NHFG
John Warner	USFWS